In the previous lessons, we have discussed the future of services (education or healthcare) and the future of cities. In the next lesson, we discuss the future of urban communities.

The *World Urban Campaign* aims to raise awareness of the UN’s *New Urban Agenda* across emerging urban communities. In your next class, we will imagine HKUST is organizing a university-based *World Urban Campaign* conference for students*.* The conference will discuss examples of successful, sustainable urban community initiatives from around the world.

To prepare for this discussion, read the examples of initiatives around the world below, and make notes on the following questions. You can bring your notes to the class discussion.

* 1. What do you think makes a successful urban community?
  2. What do you think makes a sustainable urban community?
  3. Which initiatives below do you most like? Why?
  4. Which of these initiatives would be most feasible or effective in Hong Kong?
  5. Which of these initiatives do you think are most and least important in building a successful, sustainable urban community? Why?
  6. What other sustainable initiatives does Hong Kong have, that other urban communities could benefit from adopting?

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| **1) A commercial initiative –** Banning outdoor advertising  **Location –** Sao Paolo, Brazil  **Think –** *How could an outdoor advertising ban help to create a healthier urban community?*  Advertising in outdoor spaces (banners, billboards and large signage) has grown rapidly in the last 30 years. Many urban areas are covered in advertisements in almost all outdoor spaces: in the streets, on public transport, on buildings, etc. While other adverts on television can be switched off, and the adverts on much of the internet can be controlled or reduced to some extent, outdoor advertising cannot. Outdoor advertising is inescapable, pushing brands into our urban wallpaper. For this reason, outdoor advertising is considered by some to be “visual pollution”. One city in Brazil, Sao Paolo, proposed in 2007 to ban all outdoor advertising, under their new *Clean City Law*. And following this ban, 300,000 large shop signs and 15,000 billboards were removed from the streets of Sao Paolo. Other cities have since followed suit: Chennai (in India) banned outdoor billboards in 2009; Paris (in France) proposed to reduce outdoor advertisement hoardings by one third in 2011; and Tehran (in Iran) replaced all its outdoor billboards with art for 10 days in 2015.  **Read more about this topic here –** <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2015/aug/11/can-cities-kick-ads-ban-urban-billboards> |
| **2) A creative initiative –** Promoting community street art  **Location –** Kingston, Jamaica  **Think –** *How could a community street art initiative help improve an urban community?*  Outdoor art goes by many names: graffiti, murals, alfresco painting, street art, to name a few. And social acceptance of these varies considerably around the world. While some consider street art vandalism, other urban communities actively promote initiatives to encourage street art. In 2014, an urban initiative called *Paint Jamaica* started in Kingston’s inner cities. The project aimed to make the streets more beautiful, and engage members of the community, and build a sense of community spirit and pride. The founders of *Paint Jamaica* first researched within the urban community, learning about the people of the community and their stories. They then tasked a group of artists with bringing creativity and art to these communities, by painting colourful street art of scenes representing the stories of the community members, and reflecting the community’s strength and resilience.  **Read more about this topic here –** <https://www.designindaba.com/articles/creative-work/engaging-community-through-street-art> |
| **3) A climate initiative –** Outdoor air conditioning  **Location –** Doha, Qatar  **Think –** *How could outdoor air conditioning help develop a successful urban community?*  Many wealthy countries in hot climates have widespread indoor air conditioning. What about outdoor air conditioning? In Doha, Qatar, summers are long, hot and humid. Average summer temperatures reach up to around 40 degrees. In July 2010, temperatures reached 50 degrees. In fact, in the last 30 years, Qatar has been one of the most rapidly warming countries in the world. To cope with the heat, Qatar has engineered systems for outdoor air conditioning, in places like soccer stadiums, outdoor markets, sidewalks and outdoor shopping streets. This does not come cheap. Outdoor air conditioning is absurdly expensive, consumes a huge amount of resources, and contributes to the cycle of global warming. Yet, many in the urban community have welcomed outdoor air conditioning, and point to its ability to bring the community together in more outdoor spaces and increase productivity and personal wellbeing.  **Read more about this topic here** – <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2019/world/climate-environment/climate-change-qatar-air-conditioning-outdoors/> |
| **4) A recreational space initiative –** Converting old train-lines into parks  **Location –** New York, USA  **Think –** *How does recreational space help create a successful, sustainable urban community?*  Outdoor recreational space (parks, outdoor sports facilities, walking trails, green spaces, etc.) are a highly prized part of many urban communities. Yet land is expensive and creating large new parks in existing urban communities is impossible without significant redevelopment and reconstruction. Yet in 2009, New York City opened a large new park called *The High Line*. Unlike other parks, *The High Line* park is not at street level. It is elevated above the streets, because it is a park created out of a disused train track – and almost 2.5km long. The train track went out of use in 1980, and became an eyesore and wasted space for almost 3 decades. But through *The High Line* project the space has been transformed into a beautiful green area for pedestrians to relax above the city, with views of New York’s skyline. New York is not the only place to transform disused train lines: Paris completed a similar project in 1993, and many other cities have since followed suit.  **Read more about this topic here** – <https://www.timeout.com/newyork/parks/highline> |
| **5) An transport initiative –** Developing covered cycling paths  **Location –** Berlin, Germany  **Think –** *How do cycling paths help create a successful, sustainable urban community?*  Many urban communities are seeking solutions to traffic and environmental problems. For some, cycle paths can kill two birds with one stone. For several decades, Germany has embraced cycle paths, constructing inner city paths, recreational paths and even cycle paths that run from one city to another for long distance cycling. Berlin has proposed the *Radbahn* cycle path. This will be a bike route of over 9 km, along one of Berlin’s main roads. Like many cycle paths in Germany, it will be separated from the main road, for safety and health reasons, and lined with green spaces, service stations, and small cafes for the cyclists. But what is unique about this route, is that the entire 9 km will be covered, because it is proposed to run under the elevated train line, which is currently an unused space, occupied by illegally parked cars. Transforming this space into a covered cycle path will enable cyclists to ride, protected from the weather.  **Read more about this topic here** – <https://www.bikecitizens.net/radbahn-berlin-cycle-path/> |
| **6) A public service initiative –** Free Wi-Fi across the entire urban area  **Location** – Tallinn, Estonia  **Think –** *How could free Wi-Fi throughout a city contribute to a successful, sustainable urban community?*  Most urban communities depend on the internet. Yet, for most, the internet is a considered a service, which you must pay to access. Where Wi-Fi is available for free, it is often slow or inaccessible. But in Estonia, the internet is more than just a service. It is seen as a symbol of freedom and democracy. Estonians considered that if the government was using the internet, the people should be able to too. 30 years ago, as a Soviet republic, only half the population had a phone line. But within 10 years after gaining its independence, 97% of schools had the internet, and free Wi-Fi had been rolled out across the city of Tallinn. Today, thanks to the government’s investment in free internet for all, Estonia leads the way on internet freedom, and is one of the most connected countries in the world. You can cross 150 km without losing Wi-Fi connection, and engage in the highest number of digital public services in the EU – including online voting – which few other countries have mastered.  **Read more about this topic here –** <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2012/apr/15/estonia-ussr-shadow-internet-titan> |